

# The Parish of The Sherbornes with Pamber

## Complaints policy

We recognise that our church members and all those who visit our church or any of our church activities have the right to expect high quality services. However, we also appreciate that from time to time there may be occasions where we fall short of the quality of service that can be reasonably expected. We view complaints as an opportunity to learn and improve for the future, as well as a chance to put things right for the person or organisation that has made the complaint. In the first instance we ask that you raise any complaint directly with the church member concerned but if their response does not meet the expected standards then you have the right to raise a formal complaint.

Our policy is:

- To provide a fair complaints procedure that is clear and easy to use for anyone wishing to make a complaint.
- To make sure everyone knows what to do if a complaint is received.
- To make sure all complaints are investigated fairly and in a timely way.
- To make sure that complaints are, wherever possible, resolved and that relationships are repaired.
- To gather information which helps us to improve what we do.

### Definition of a complaint

A complaint is a written or verbal expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet about an action, a lack of action by a person acting on behalf of the church, or about the policies or procedures of the church.

### A complaint could be about:

- Conduct of our clergy and/or some or all members of our church
- The standard or sort of service we provide
- Discrimination
- Provision of inaccurate information
- Poor administration including delays in responding to enquiries

### What is the purpose of the policy

- To protect the interest of all church users and visitors
- To improve the quality of the services we provide by responding to the views and needs of people affected
- To enable church users and visitors to propose improvements to our ways of working
- To protect our Rector and church members
- To provide a means of monitoring our performance

### Confidentiality

All complaint information will be handled sensitively, telling only those who need to know, and following any relevant data protection requirements.

### Responsibility

Overall responsibility for this policy and its implementation lies with the Rector and / or Church Wardens.

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### Monitoring and learning from complaints

All complaints will be recorded and kept on file, including those which were resolved without being put in writing. The Complaints Form shall be used for this. All complaints shall be treated with due regard to the Confidentiality Policy.

### Managing complaints

The clergy and all PCC members should be familiar with this policy and the process for managing complaints. Complaints against clergy should be passed to the archdeacon or diocesan bishop.

**If a complaint or grievance relates to or includes an allegation that a child or adult who may be vulnerable has been harmed or is at risk of harm, or that another child may have caused harm to a child or adult who may be vulnerable, it must be responded to through the Diocesan and Charity Commission for handling allegations of abuse.**

All complaints should be recorded by [the PCC Secretary] in the appropriate file and kept with the PCC minutes. Details should include the nature of the complaint and the date received, the process followed and the action taken and the outcomes including further follow-up. The chairman will keep the PCC (or Standing Committee, as appropriate) informed of the number of complaints and outcomes.

### How is a complaint dealt with?

#### Step 1 – Informal procedure

The aim when responding to complaints is ideally to enable them to be resolved informally, speedily and fairly, by mutual discussion.

- The person making the complaint should in the first instance speak to the person(s) deemed responsible for the area of dissatisfaction or disquiet, which hopefully will be resolved to everyone's satisfaction
- A note should be agreed at the end of the discussion, summarising the complaint, the date, who was involved and the agreed outcome. This should be passed to the Church Wardens to ensure lessons are learned by the Church

#### Step 2 – Formal procedure

- The complaint should be made in writing, marked 'confidential' to the Incumbent (Rector) or Churchwardens who will acknowledge the complaint in writing within 10 days.
- The recipient of the complaint will investigate the circumstances leading to the complaint and will communicate the results of the investigation to the complainant within a reasonable time, normally within 20 working days of the complaint being received.
- If the investigation includes a meeting with the complainant he / she may be accompanied / supported by a friend (but not a legal representative)
- If the complaint is found to be justified, the investigator will agree any further action with the complainant (and PCC if appropriate)
- A note should be agreed at that point, summarising the complaint, the date and who was involved and the agreed outcome, and passed to a Churchwarden to ensure lessons are learned by the church

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If the complainant is still not satisfied they should move to the Appeal Process.

### Step 3 – Appeal

- The complainant will have the right, if dissatisfied with the result of Step 2, to put their case in writing to an appeal panel of three PCC members, which will include at least one Churchwarden and one officer of the PCC
- If the appeal is found to be justified, the appeal panel will agree any further action with the complainant
- The response will be confirmed in writing within 10 days of the meeting held to hear it
- A note should be agreed at that point, summarising the complaint, the date, who was involved and the agreed outcome and passed to the Churchwardens to ensure lessons are learned by the church
- The decision of the appeal panel is final and no further appeal is possible.

### Review

This policy will be reviewed every two years, and updated as required.

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### **Appendix 1 - Practical guidance for handling verbal complaints**

- Remain calm and respectful throughout the conversation.
- Listen - allow the person to talk about the complaint in their own words. Sometimes a person just wants to "let off steam".
- Don't debate the facts in the first instance, especially if the person is angry.
- Show an interest in what is being said.
- Obtain details about the complaint before any personal details.
- Ask for clarification wherever necessary.
- Show that you have understood the complaint by reflecting back what you have noted down.
- Acknowledge the person's feelings (even if you feel that they are being unreasonable) - you can do this without making a comment on the complaint itself or making any admission of fault e.g. "I understand that this situation is frustrating for you".
- If you feel that an apology is deserved for something then apologise.
- Ask the person what they would like done to resolve the issue.
- Be clear about what you can do, how long it will take and what it will involve.
- Don't promise things you can't deliver.
- Make sure that the person understands what they have been told.
- Wherever appropriate, inform the person about the available avenues of review or appeal.